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ABSTRACT

Two studies compared the impact of black and white audiences on black students' writing style. In the first study, eight students in an all-black intermediate composition class completed one argumentative draft addressed to black opponents and one addressed to white opponents on two different topics. The essays were examined for stylistic features of black discourse, including exaggerated language, mimicry, aphorisms, word play, and image-making. Results of the first study indicated significant evidence of "styling" in the students' drafts for black audiences. A follow-up study incorporated questionnaires, discourse-based interviews, counterbalanced audience assignment, and independent coding. Fifteen students in a similar class completed similar writing assignments. Results indicated that: (1) of the eight types of "styling," only image-making appeared far more often in the students' writing for blacks; and (2) three students "styled" more often in their writing for blacks, one "styled" for whites only, and four other students "styled" for whites and blacks. Findings suggest that assignments for a black audience can elicit "styling" that may be absent or rare in writing for a white audience, but the effect is limited. Findings also suggest that teachers of black students should become aware of the African American tradition so that s/he can make students who "style" aware of what they are doing and show them how to do it more effectively. (Thirty-four references, one table of data, the instructions to students for writing the essays, questionnaires, instructions for coders, and the coding guide are attached.) (RS)

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UNTAPPED RESOURCES:

"STYLING" IN BLACK STUDENTS' WRITING FOR BLACK AUDIENCES

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Untapped Resources:
"Styling" in Black Students' Writing for Black Audiences

African Americans are heirs to a rich rhetorical tradition, a tradition rooted in the cultures of Africa and cultivated in the streets and churches of Black America (see Abrahams, Asante, Labov, and Smitherman). It is mainly an oral tradition, consisting of such verbal arts as signifying, toasting, talk-singing, punning, rhyming, and image-making.[1] However, it has also had an impact on writing, especially since the 1960s when many black creative writers began "modeling their work upon styles derived from Afro-American culture" (Turner 305).

During nine years of teaching composition at a historically black university, I had rarely seen such "styling" in my students' writing, and I began to wonder why.[2] Perhaps my students were too far removed from the tradition: Many of them had grown up in newly integrated neighborhoods, had gone to predominantly white schools, or had attended Anglicized churches. On the other hand, I thought, my students might have assumed that "styling" was inappropriate in college writing. Yet "styling" is a useful academic exercise, for it is a form of verbal acrobatics, a way students can exert control over their language. Moreover, as Edward Anderson (223-24) has pointed out, many "styling" devices involving imagery, sound, and rhythm are potential tools for making compositions vivid and euphonious--for entertaining, instructing, and moving an audience.

This line of thinking led me to consider the relationship between my students' writing and the cultural background of their audiences. Both theory and research indicate that the type of audience writers address can affect their style. Rhetoricians from Plato to Perelman have explained how perceptions of one's audience (or discourse community) shape discourse. "Text is always conditioned, whether consciously or unconsciously, by those persons [the writer] wishes to address," write Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (7). Thus a persuasive writer will seek "objects of agreement," something the audience will accept. According to Burke, the search for such "objects of agreement" can greatly affect a writer's style. He explains, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (55). Researchers have found that such audience considerations play a central role in the composing process of skilled writers (Flower and Hayes).

Certainly, as they compose, writers need to consider the cultural tradition of their audience, for it is both a means of finding "objects of agreement" and a way of "talking the audience's language." Thus, we would expect skilled writers to adapt their writing to the audience's cultural background--especially if they share that background. Or, as they invent a role for an audience, we would expect skilled writers to signal that role through allusions to

cultural texts and experience. However, even an unskilled writer might invoke the cultural tradition of the audience, since writing is conditioned "consciously or *unconsciously*" by one's audience. As suggested by Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" and Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality," voices of the culture may speak through a writer's text unbeknownst to the writer.

According to rhetorical studies of oratory, many black audiences expect to hear these voices, and their expectations influence black speakers (Asante; Brockriede and Scott; Illo; Williamson-Ige). Asante notes that "black audiences demand to hear certain expressions, to see certain things, and to enjoy certain kinds of humor" (41). As a result, black speakers may resort to a type of rhetorical "code switching" (Blom & Gumperz), switching from a mainstream rhetoric to the rhetoric of their black discourse community. Of particular interest is Illo's observation that Malcolm X assumed an ornate speaking style in front of a black audience:

> Before the great black audiences Malcolm adopted a tone and ornament that were his and his audience's but that he relinquished before the white or the academic. The composition was rich in ethnic figuration and humor, in paronomasia, alliteration and rhyme. (172)

Clearly, for black audiences, Malcolm X drew heavily upon the black rhetorical tradition. Therefore I wondered, "What would happen to my students' writing style if I assigned a black

audience?" As their teacher, I was not a suitable black audience. But if I asked my students to persuade other African Americans, would they draw upon the rhetorical resources of our culture? If they began to "style" in response to a black audience, I might discover rich resources for writing that--until now--I had not encouraged them to tap.

Previous studies have not explored this possibility. There are no available studies comparing the impact of black and white audiences on black students' writing style. Moreover, while international studies in contrastive rhetoric have shown that culture shapes students' writing style (Purves 10), most researchers who have written about the cultural rhetoric of black students have not shown how it affects the students' writing (Honeman; Linn; Oliver). There is some research revealing the impact of the African American tradition on black children's speech and writing (Haas Dyson; Heath), but there is little pertinent research on black adolescents' writing. One notable exception is a study by Desley Noonan-Wagner, who examined essays written by black and white students in a remedial writing class. In the black students' essays, judges found far more instances of "redundancy, the use of quotations, sermonizing and/or moralizing, and references to the Bible" (6). Noonan-Wagner argues that these differences reflect the discourse conventions of the traditional black church service. Thus, Noonan-Wagner's study suggests that black students' cultural rhetoric can influence their academic writing style, but it does not reveal

the impact of black vs. white audiences. The two studies described below re-examine the role of cultural rhetoric in conjunction with the role of audience.

EXPERIMENT 1

METHOD

The first study involved an all-black intermediate composition class that I taught in the spring of 1991.[3] During the semester I assigned two sets of exercises in audience adaptation. Each set of exercises consisted of one argumentative draft addressed to black opponents and one addressed to white opponents. The topic for the first set was affirmative action, and for the second, the causes of poverty among African Americans. In each case, I asked the students to "freewrite" so that they could more easily adapt the style as well as the content and arrangement to their target audience.[4] Also, to encourage audience adaptation, I did not return the draft for one audience until I had received the draft for the other audience.

Of the seventeen students who participated, eight submitted both sets of exercises; six, one set; and the other three, only one exercise. I examined these exercises to determine whether "styling" occurred in the drafts for black audiences and, if so, whether it occurred only in those drafts.

The stylistic features that I looked for are rhetorical qualities described by Geneva Smitherman in Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America (94-100).[5] Other scholars (among them Abrahams, Asante, Hannerz, Kochman, Labov,

and Mitchell-Kernan) have investigated black rhetorical strategies. However, for a stylistic study their categories of analysis are too narrow (e.g., Labov's syntactic categories) or too broad (e.g., Asante's Afrocentric criteria and Abrahams' taxonomy of speech events). To date, Smitherman offers the most useful approach, for she identifies stylistic features that apply to black discourse in a range of forms and contexts. Many of these features are mentioned in other descriptions of black discourse (see, for example, Abrahams 19-21; Asante 37-58). As the following list reveals, some of the features overlap with features of classical Western rhetoric:

(a) exaggerated language (high-flown words or incongruously formal phrasing)

EXAMPLE: "When Jesus walked the face of the earth, you know it upset the high ES-U-LAUNCE." [The speaker accentuates the word "echelons."]

(b) mimicry (imitation of a person's voice, language, and mannerisms)

EXAMPLE: "Like he come tellin' me this old mess bout "'Well, baby, if you just give me a chance, Ima have it together pretty soon.'"

(c) aphorisms (proverbs and other popular sayings)

EXAMPLE: "A hard head make a soft behind."

(d) word play (puns and other clever turns of phrase)

EXAMPLE: "I don't know Karate but I know Karazor." [The speaker threatens to use a razor as a weapon.]

(e) image-making (metaphors and other imagery, especially down-to-earth imagery)

EXAMPLE: Wig-wearing females "look like nine miles of bad road with a detour at the end."

(f) braggadocio (boasts about oneself or heroes)

EXAMPLE: Stag-O-Lee was so bad "flies wouldn't fly around him in the summertime."

(g) indirection (innuendo, circumlocution, or suggestiveness)

EXAMPLE: "Mr. Moderator, Brother Lomax, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies: I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend and I don't want to leave anybody out."

(h) tonal semantics (talk-singing, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, intonational contouring, and other lyrical effects)

EXAMPLE: "I am nobody talking to Somebody Who can help anybody."

RESULTS

Using Smitherman's categories, I found significant evidence of "styling" in the students' drafts for black audiences. Seven students included exaggerated language, aphorisms, word play, image-making, and/or tonal semantics in one or both of their drafts for a black audience. Since four of these students also submitted drafts addressed to a white audience, it was possible to compare their stylistic choices for black and white audiences.

The comparison revealed that they "styled" almost exclusively when addressing a black audience. Below, we will take a closer look at their work.

Gail. Gail's drafts on poverty reveal significant differences in tonal semantics. For example, in her draft for white opponents Gail makes the following statement:

> The black family, knowledge, and values are the keys to gain financial freedom.

However, in her draft for black opponents, she employs antistrophe to express the same idea more rhythmically:

> Education is the key, family is the key, values are the key to economic stability in the black community.

The conclusions of the drafts also offer a striking contrast. In the draft for white opponents, Gail's closing lines are

> The black community must fall back on their ancestors strength for the courage to say "Yes I can", regardless of the ever present obstacles that face them such as the stereotypical attitudes of many in society.

On the other hand, in the closing lines of her draft for black opponents, Gail employs isocolon and diction reminiscent of gospel songs:

> It may be hard but it can be done. We can thank our ancestors for showing us the way.

Nora. In both of her affirmative action drafts, Nora exposes the contradictions between the sacred documents of American democracy and the ugly practices of American society.

She tells a black opponent:

> **Mr. Pendelton, our Constitution may be color-blind, but unfortunately our people are not.. Our Constitution may not tolerate classes among its citizens, but our people sure do.**

In contrast, in her draft for whites, Nora expresses similar sentiments without the rhythm or antithesis that is so prominent in her draft for blacks:

> The Declaration of Independence proclaims a self evident truth that "all men are created equal". Yet this pronouncement by the Founding Fathers is contradicted by widespread social inequality.

Maria. Each of Maria's drafts for a black audience displays a talent for word play that is not apparent in either draft for a white audience. For instance, in her poverty draft for white opponents, Maria describes European colonization as follows:

> After colonization and exploitation by europeans these countries were left bone dry, without resources, impoverished and war torn.

In her poverty draft for a black audience, she uses antithesis instead:

> When europeans came to explore Africa they immediately found ways to exploit **the many** to create riches for **the few.**

Likewise, in her affirmative action draft for a black audience, we find ploce in the last line: "We do not need **Affirmative** Action, we need an **affirmative** plan to free ourselves!"

Clara. Clara likes to create images. We can glimpse her

image-making ability in her draft to white opponents when she writes, "In a society where the fabric of the black family is being torn apart legally it is highly unlikely that we will not improve if discrimination were to vanish." This is the only image in that draft. Yet Clara's draft to a black audience is filled with images. For example, the draft opens with two vivid scenes depicting the home life of a black man before and after he loses his job. The draft also ends with a burst of imagery:

> We are poor because we have been raped repeatedly. Doors are not opened to us, it has been a facade. We are poor not only economically but socially as well. We attempt as a people to climb from this hole, but dirt is constantly being piled on top of us, pushing us farther into our holes of despair.

In contrast, Clara's draft to white opponents begins with a statistic. It concludes without imagery:

> Discrimination has attributed to our poverty levels especially over the past twenty years. We have been ignored for long enough from the immediate concerns of the government, and we need to realize that our poverty is not self-inflicted but government institutionalized.

Steve. In contrast to the four "stylers" described above, one student--Steve--"styled" only for a white audience: He included an analogy in one draft for whites but not in the corresponding draft for blacks. He made the following comparison:

> Rich White America needs to help support the advancement of color people and other minorities because this group of whites has the largest affect on young Blacks who are to become our nation's future professionals. It is a lot easier to focus o[n] our Black youth because it is a lot easier to change the growth of a baby tree because it is easier to manipulate than an older tree. The old tree is set in its growth and will break if pressed upon too much.

DISCUSSION

This preliminary study raised more questions than it answered. For instance, one might ask, "Why didn't more students 'style' in their drafts for black audiences?" Several factors may account for their performance.

First, we must recall that the oral tradition is longer and stronger than the written tradition in the black community. Thus students who did not "style" in their writing may have done so in their speech. However, we cannot overlook the impact of acculturation. As I mentioned above, some of my students did not grow up steeped in a black rhetorical tradition.

Second, the results may reflect the type of audiences the students imagined. According to Illo, Malcolm X rarely "styled" for an academic audience (172). Thus, some students may have refrained from "styling" because they imagined a well-educated black audience.

At the same time, the academic setting may have been a powerful constraint. Although I assigned freewriting, some

students may have hesitated to "rap" to a black audience in an academic paper. Moreover, because I was their teacher--an overhearer rather than a rhetorically engaged audience--the students had to imagine their black opponents. Research shows that imagining an audience rarely has the effects on writing that addressing a real audience does (see Redd-Boyd and Slater for a review, 79-82, 97-99).

Even when students can imagine a target audience, they vary in their ability and willingness to adapt their writing to that audience. Studies have shown that skilled writers are more aware of their audiences and more adept at adapting their writing to those audiences (Redd-Boyd and Slater, 79-82, 97-99). Perhaps most of my students were not skilled enough to carry out the assignment. It is worth noting that three of the four "stylers" in this study were among the most able writers in the class.

When we consider the four students who "styled" almost exclusively for black audiences, another question arises: Does the assignment of different audiences account for the differences in their drafts? Most of these students submitted their draft for a black audience before submitting the corresponding one for a white audience. Thus, some may have felt that they could not include a certain line or image in their draft for whites because they had already used it in their draft for blacks. However, such order effects are unlikely since I had announced that both drafts could be "basically the same" if they were appropriate for both audiences. Furthermore, order effects cannot explain why

other examples of "styling" seldom or never appeared in the four students' drafts for white audiences.

Still, I needed to control for possible order effects. I also needed to know more about my students' background, their perceptions, and their intentions. Why, for instance, did Steve "style" only for a white audience? In order to answer such questions, I designed a follow-up study, incorporating questionnaires, discourse-based interviews, and counterbalanced audience assignments as well as independent coding. The follow-up study tested two hypotheses, one focusing on the types of "styling," the other on the students who "styled":

H1: When black students write for black and white audiences, some **types** of "styling" will appear more often in their writing for blacks.

H2: When black students write for black and white audiences, some **students** will "style" more often in their writing for blacks.

EXPERIMENT 2

METHOD

The follow-up study explored the writing of 16 students in an all-black intermediate composition class that I taught in the fall of 1991.[6] The majority of the students had a traditional African American background: 11 had grown up in black neighborhoods, 9 had attended black or well-integrated schools, 10 had gone to Baptist or Pentecostal churches, and 12 frequently

spoke Black English. During the semester I assigned these students the audience adaptation exercises described above: the affirmative action and poverty assignments. However, this semester 3 lessons on style preceded the poverty assignment--lessons about voice, clarity, wordiness, parallelism, and metaphors.

When I announced the poverty assignment, I distributed sheets that

(a) introduced the topic

(b) designated black and white opponents as the target audiences

(c) explained freewriting

(d) specified the criteria for evaluation (i.e., "how well you adapt the style, content, and arrangement").

To reduce order effects, the assignment sheets also included counterbalanced due dates as well as the statement "If you believe that something is appropriate for both audiences, you may use it in both drafts." Finally, the sheet instructed students to write on the outside of each draft a brief description of their target audience (see Appendix).

Of the 16 students, 15 completed both sets of exercises, while 1 submitted a complete set and an incomplete set. (The incomplete set was discarded.) As in the preliminary study, I did not return the draft for one audience until I had received the draft for the other audience.

After I had returned both poverty drafts, I interviewed 7

students and asked the rest of the students to fill out two questionnaires.[7] Thirteen students completed Questionnaire #1, and all students completed Questionnaire #2. Questionnaire #1 asked the students to describe their target audiences for the poverty assignment and to say whether they had changed their writing style: If so, how? If not, why not? (see Appendix). Questionnaire #2 (filled out a week later) asked students about

(a) the ethnic make-up of their neighborhood and schools

(b) the cultural tradition of their church

(c) their use of Black English Vernacular and Black street slang.

This questionnaire also posed the following questions: "What kind of speaking and writing styles are black audiences most receptive to? What kind of speaking and writing styles are white audiences most receptive to?" (see Appendix).

During the interviews, I asked the students the questions from the questionnaires, but before proceeding to Questionnaire #2, I showed the students contrasting passages in their affirmative action and poverty drafts. At this point, I conducted discourse-based interviews, following the example of Odell and Goswami. However, while Odell and Goswami asked subjects about variations between unrelated pieces of writing, I asked my students about variations between drafts on the same topic.

Since the focus of the study was "styling," I asked the students to explain why they had added, omitted, or replaced one

of the selected features. To reduce experimenter effects, I took the following precautions: I asked nondirective questions such as "Why did you omit this?" or "Could you elaborate?" and I urged the students to admit when they did not know the answer.

Two graduate students coded the students' drafts, looking for the selected features. Both coders were African Americans pursuing a Ph.D. in African American literature, and neither knew the purpose or design of the experiment. First, the coders read Smitherman's description of the features (94-100) and discussed 6 samples from the pilot study. Then, they coded the rest of the drafts independently. (See the instructions and coding guide in the Appendix.) At first, they achieved a low rate of agreement across categories (41%). However, in conference they resolved all but 3 disagreements, increasing the rate of agreement to 99%. The 3 disputed items were excluded.

RESULTS

All of the students indicated on their papers or on Questionnaire #1 that they had tried to accommodate black and white opponents. Most of the reported audiences (see Table 1) were generalized racial categories (i.e., blacks vs. whites). Relatively few were described as well-educated.

Questionnaire #2 and the interview tapes reveal that most students felt that black and white audiences prefer different speaking/writing styles. Five students said that blacks like a "straightforward" and "down-to-earth" style. Four said that blacks respond well to "non-proper" English, such as slang or

Black English Vernacular. Three other students claimed that blacks like a "powerful" or "moving" style, and three suggested that images or stories appeal to blacks.[8]

These perceptions contrast with the students' descriptions of "white" styles of speaking and writing. According to four students, whites prefer "wordy," "intellectual" discourse that is filled with "big words." The English must be "White English," that is, "proper" or "formal." Whites need no embellishments--just the facts, said three other students.

Three students stated that blacks and whites are receptive to similar styles of speaking and writing.

Despite their claims, when I questioned the students about their strategies for the poverty drafts, only four students said that they had tried to achieve a more "professional" or "formal" tone for whites or a more "emotional" tone for blacks. Indeed, some of the very students who differentiated between "black" and "white" styles admitted that they had not tried to adapt their styles; they had focused on adapting the content instead. Two students seemed to be confused about what style <u>was</u>, assuming that it was strictly a matter of essay organization or the selection of arguments. Nevertheless, as I will explain below, there are significant stylistic differences in some students' writing for black and white audiences.

DISTRIBUTION OF STYLISTIC FEATURES

Of the stylistic features associated with the African-American oral tradition, aphorisms, word play, image-making, indirection, and tonal semantics were identified in the students' drafts (see the boldface in the examples below). Only one striking trend emerges from the data: The majority of the students employed more images in their drafts for black audiences. We will now review each of the 5 identified features.

Aphorisms

Of the 8 students who employed aphorisms, 4 incorporated them exclusively in their drafts for blacks. Below are some examples.

> **There is a saying that a man must be down before he can get up.** Well, Black America it is time to get up. (Alice)

> **A great philosopher once said for every one door that closes, there are at least ten waiting to be [broken?] down.** Behind these doors lies the key from [which] any hope and good life can be obtained. **The road is going to be hard but any[thing] worth having is worth fighting for** and the end result will be a race [that] is worthy of it's culture. (Crissie)

> **You have to be twice as good just to be considered half as good as a white boy whose only half as good as you."** (Giselle)

Three students included aphorisms only for a white audience. Two chose similar aphorisms:

> Nothing earned comes easy. (Carmen)
>
> In this world if you want something, you have to work hard for it. (JoAnn)

The other student put a new twist on an old aphorism:

> Overall, the government is designed to make the rich get richer and the poor so-called "middle-class" get poorer. (Keisha)

Word Play

The coders agreed that 4 students engaged in word play, 2 for whites only and 1 for blacks only. Below are three examples of the students' word play:

> Affirmative Action keeps those who have been discriminated against in the past from being mistreated in the present and the future. (Keisha)
>
> In looking [at] the educational aspect, we find that Blacks aren't pushed to succeed as much as whites are. They are pushed into remedial classes. (Selma)
>
> Afro-Americans are too materialistic instead of being realistic. (Maxine)

Image-Making

Image-making was the most common "styling" device. Some images were analogies (e.g., "Just as the runner needed a head

start since he was discriminated against initially, Blacks should continue to receive affirmative action"). Some were clichés and echoes of Civil Rights speeches, folk sermons, or gospel lyrics (e.g., "get their foot in the door," "the first hu[r]dling block of a long road ahead"). Others were highly unconventional ("Affirmative action is just like potty training is to a child"). Of the 15 students who invoked images in their drafts, 11 invoked more images when addressing a black audience, 3 of them only when addressing blacks. Here are some examples:

> Affirmative action is like stealing (taking something that might not be rightfully yours). (Carmen)

> A black man simply cannot make it over the socio-economic wall without the help of Affirmative Action . . . . (Raoul)

> Currently, in our society the resources available to all citizens is shrinking this means whatever small portion that was available to African Americans (and other minorities who share our tiny pie) is rapidly disappearing. (Crissie)

Of the 15 image-makers, 2 made more images for their white audiences, images such as

> Affirmative Action can be seen as a raincheck for the pain our ancestors endured . . . . (Maxine)

> Blacks are only able to scale the social ladder as far as

White America allows them, and not as far as they are capable of. (Alice)

Indirection

The coders identified only one instance of indirection, a sentence in a draft for blacks:

As a result, we are being so-called "rewarded" by being allowed to hold the unskilled or manual labor jobs many of our people have been granted. (Keisha)

Tonal Semantics

According to the coders, 7 students employed tonal semantics in their drafts. The most common forms consisted of parallel phrases with repeated or contrasting words. Of the 7 students, 4 used these techniques more often for black audiences, 2 of them exclusively for blacks. For instance, Carmen declared,

[Since] we want to be treated equal everything should be equal.

And Selma wrote,

As a result, the race of Blacks are discouraged and dismayed.

On the other hand, two students included more tonal semantics in their drafts for whites, writing, for example,

Affirmative Action is not a race issue it is a people issue. (Keisha)

or

> He did not look at what has happened, he focused on what is happening. (Maxine)

STYLING FOR BLACKS VS. WHITES

After examining the data, I shifted my focus to the students. To identify a student's tendency to "style" for a particular audience, I searched for a consistent pattern in all four drafts of the Affirmative Action and Poverty assignments. Only students with a consistent pattern of "styling" are discussed below.

Styling for Blacks Only

Three students "styled" only in their drafts for black opponents. One was Joetta, a student who had attended a white high school and Catholic church, but had grown up in a black neighborhood and home where she had learned Black English. Joetta "styled" by extending a conventional metaphor throughout the concluding paragraph of a draft for blacks:

> Although many African-Americans are at the top or middle of the economic ladder, there are many who are at the bottom. As long as racism and disunity exists among the African-American community, many Blacks will fall down the economic ladder or stay in the same submissive state.

The conclusion of Joetta's corresponding draft for "racist white people" lacks such imagery:

> Although a number of African-Americans are poor for reasons

other than racism, there is a larger number of African-Americans who are poor because of racism. Unfortunately, in our racist American society, the system will continually oppress the Black race as a whole.

Rhonda's concluding paragraphs offer a similar contrast. Rhonda was a product of a black neighborhood, a black high school, and a black Pentecostal church; she frequently spoke Black English. In her conclusion for black conservatives, Rhonda--the daughter of a Pentecostal preacher--conjured up religious images:

> In conclusion, the majority of African-Americans feel that Affirmative Action is necessary and fair. Those African-Americans who oppose affirmative action have benefitted from it at one time or another & can be considered "sell-outs". They have, in a way, **sold their souls to the devil in which the devil is the White Man or Mainstream Society.** Once again, affirmative action is fair & for the most part extremely necessary for the advancement of African-Americans in these United States.

The corresponding conclusion for "most whites" is not only free of the fire and brimstone, but filled with polite jargon such as "advantaged" and "disadvantaged groups."

> In conclusion, Affirmative action is indeed fair. Members of advantaged groups should want to share with instead of take away from those members of disadvantaged groups. Without Affirmative action, progress or advancement is

unlikely to happen for someone who is a member of a disadvantaged group.

Joetta and Rhonda reported that they did not consciously adapt their style to an audience. However, during her interview, Joetta claimed that blacks prefer a "powerful" and "lively" style, while whites just want information. Rhonda did not say which styles blacks and whites prefer.

One other student, Leroy, consistently "styled" for blacks only. Leroy had a traditional black upbringing--black neighborhood, mostly black school, Baptist church--and he spoke Black English "all the time." Leroy's "styling" was sparse. For instance, instead of opening with the question "Why are African Americans so disproportionately poor?" as he did in his poverty draft for whites, he begins his poverty draft for "depressed blacks" with a simple antithesis:

> In today's society, **there are those people who are rich, and there are those who are poor.** The white race tends more to be those who are rich; while the black race are the unfortunate poor people.

According to Leroy, blacks prefer speakers and writers who "get to the point" and "tell it like it is," while whites prefer those who "sound intellectual." Although Leroy seems to "tell it like it is" in the excerpt for blacks, he claimed that he concentrated on adapting the content rather than the style of his drafts.

Aside from their tendency to "style" for black audiences, Joetta, Rhonda, and Leroy had little in common: They varied in

terms of their cultural background, writing performance, and their conceptions of their audiences.

Styling for Whites Only

Contrary to my hypothesis, one student consistently "styled" for white audiences only. Her name was Faye. She had grown up in a white neighborhood attending white schools. However, she had been a member of a traditional Baptist church and said that she occasionally spoke Black English. Faye's "styling" for whites can be seen in the concluding paragraph of her poverty draft for white individualists. The paragraph contains a series of parallel phrases and battle imagery:

> African Americans have remained disproportionately poor as a result of racism. Racism has caused black Americans to loose initiative, to receive inadequate education and to remain in low salary jobs. Until the war against racism is won, blacks will remain defeated in the battle against discrimination.

Yet Faye's concluding paragraph for bourgeois and professional blacks is unadorned:

> Blacks remain in poverty as a result of racism. Discrimination in the workfor[c]e and in the education system has been the major factor in limiting the economic progress of blacks. Until attempts are made to eliminate inequalities in the workfor[c]e and in the education system, many blacks will remain at poverty level.

During her interview, Faye said that she had deliberately

used the battle imagery in the poverty draft for whites because she felt that she needed to adopt an "aggressive" tone to persuade her white opponents, while arousing the sympathy of her black opponents. However, later in the interview, Faye had second thoughts about her strategy for the black audience. When asked which style blacks prefer, Faye replied, "A style of writing that motivates them . . . . powerful words." Then, after a moment's reflection, she added, "Probably the conclusion that I wrote to the white audience [the one with the battle imagery] might appeal more to the black audience because they kinda like to hear aggressive things, motivational kinda like things."

Styling for Blacks and Whites

Four students consistently "styled" for blacks and whites in both sets of drafts. Two of the students--Greta and Carmen--claimed that blacks and whites appreciate the same speaking and writing styles. However, the other two students--Keisha and Maxine--thought otherwise. We will examine their work.

Keisha had grown up in a black neighborhood and black schools, speaking Black English, but she had attended a Catholic church. Although Keisha "styled" for whites as well as blacks, all but one of the images in her writing appear in her drafts for blacks. For instance, in her Affirmative Action draft for black opponents, she explains how "Affirmative Action has opened doors for Blacks that have been closed or cracked for centuries," saying that Affirmative Action programs "help minorities get their foot in the door." She also challenges critics who accuse

blacks of taking "an easy detour" through Affirmative Action and speaks of "the shadow of white America."[9] When I asked her why she had used more images for the black audience, she could not say. With the exception of pronouns, she did not try to adapt her style. Yet, later, when I asked her if blacks and whites preferred different speaking and writing styles, she insisted that blacks "like more images . . . strong voices" and that "whites basically don't care as long as the message is comin' across." Surprisingly, she did not notice the relationship between this remark and her use of imagery.

In contrast to Keisha, Maxine used the most imagery in her poverty draft for whites. Maxine, who occasionally spoke Black English, had roots in a Baptist church but was a product of white schools and a white neighborhood. In her poverty draft for blacks ("upper middle-class on down"), she referred to racism as "this sickness . . . being spread around the United States." But in her draft for white society, she also compared poverty to "the AIDS of the Black Community" and Affirmative Action to a "vaccine." She concluded the draft with the lines

> . . . White America needs to stop injecting Afro-Americans with diseases like racism. The government needs to support the Black community and give economic relief. Black youths are drowning and need to be saved out of the pool of poverty.

Maxine said that she had used these images for whites only because she needed "hard-hitting" images to persuade her "racist"

white audience. However, like Keisha, she later described the best style for blacks as "a writing style that they can relate to . . . . images that they can see, those things that they may have experienced, those things that they may have heard about or their ancestors have experienced." Whites, she explained, are used to a "boring style," but they are interested in a black style. Again, like Keisha, she did not make a connection between her remarks and her use of imagery.

Maxine used not only more images but also more tonal semantics in her drafts for whites. However, her comments about the tonal semantics and word play in one draft suggest that her target audience was a moving target. Consider the following paragraph from her poverty draft for a white audience:

> The Afro-American feels that he must meet the status quo and were Gucci, Liz Claiborne, and Polo because those are the most expensive tastes of clothing, everyone wants to have the best. However, there's a problem when one does not have a phone or electricity due that leather coat. Due to mixed up priorities, one better sleep in that leather coat to keep warm without electricity. Afro-Americans spend their money on the wrong things and so they suffer. Afro Americans are too **materialistic** instead of being **realistic.**

Even though a similar paragraph appears in Maxine's draft for blacks, the pairing of "materialistic" and "realistic" occurs only in the draft for whites. When I queried Maxine about this word play, she blurted out, "You know what? I think I was

thinking of a black audience here! I got my audience mixed up."

Apart from their tendency to "style" for blacks and whites, Greta, Carmen, Keisha, and Maxine shared few characteristics. Thus, there was nothing about their background, their performance in my class, or their choice of audiences that explained their pattern of "styling."

DISCUSSION

Summary

The results of Experiment 2 offer limited support for both of the hypotheses about black students' "styling" for black audiences.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that certain types of "styling" would appear more often in drafts for blacks as opposed to whites. Of the 8 types of "styling," only one--image-making--appeared far more often in the students' writing for blacks: 11 students included more images in their drafts for blacks, while only 2 students included more in their drafts for whites. Consciously or unconsciously, the students may have been adapting to the cultural tradition of their black audiences. Indeed, the interview and questionnaire data show that some students thought blacks prefer image-filled discourse. However, the preponderance of imagery in drafts for blacks may have more to do with "intertextuality" and "heteroglossia" than with "image-making." Since some of the images are commonplaces--clichés and echoes of speeches, sermons, or lyrics--the students may have been invoking shared texts rather than making images per se. If so, the

commonplaces are a sign of audience adaptation, not lack of imagination. As the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. reveals, commonplaces can be a powerful tool for persuading audiences because they are ready-made "audience-approved language" (Miller 260-261).[10]

Hypothesis 2 predicted that some students would "style" more often in their writing for blacks. Such was the case for 3 students, Joetta, Rhonda, and Leroy. Contrary to my hypothesis, one student--Faye--"styled" for whites only. Four other students--Greta, Carmen, Keisha, and Maxine--"styled" for whites and blacks. These "styling" differences could not be explained by the order of the audience assignments, the students' cultural background data, or the educational level of their reported audiences.

However, three important observations can be made about these "styling" differences. First, for Faye and Maxine, their white opponents were more distant and hostile than their black opponents. For such a hostile and distant audience, they felt that they needed more ammunition, so they deliberately used more images to persuade whites. In other words, they thought that persuading a hostile and distant audience would take "everything they've got." This trend is consistent with previous findings that distant audiences elicit greater syntactic maturity, more contextualization, and stronger refutation than intimate audiences do (Collins & Williamson; Rubin; Rubin & Piché). Likewise, hostile audiences stimulate more dialectical activity

(Hays, Brandt, and Chantry). However, in this study the white opponents were not always the most distant and hostile. Consider, for example, Rhonda's disdain for black conservatives whom she brands as "sell-outs." From her perspective, these black traitors are as bad as--or perhaps worse--than--her white enemies. Clearly, how distant and hostile an audience is depends on a student's perceptions, not the audience's race.

My second observation concerns the students' haphazard use of "styling." All of the students indicated that they had considered how to adapt the content of their arguments to their target audiences. Yet few considered how to adapt the style of their arguments, even when they thought that blacks and whites preferred different styles. The three students who "styled" exclusively for blacks said that they did not consciously adapt their style. Likewise, Keisha, who "styled" for blacks and whites, used more imagery for blacks, but had no idea why. Faye and Maxine also "styled" inconsistently. Although Faye did not "style" for blacks at all, she subsequently decided that she should have used images for blacks too. As for Maxine, who "styled" for blacks and whites, she realized that at times in a draft for whites she had addressed blacks. Even during their interviews, Maxine and Keisha did not notice the relationship between what they said blacks preferred and what style they used for blacks. Only Greta and Carmen seemed to have "styled" in a manner consistent with their statements: Both said that blacks and whites appreciate similar styles, and both "styled" similarly

for blacks and whites. Clearly, in their case "styling" for both audiences was not due to an inability to switch codes.

Finally, my third observation relates to freewriting. In some cases, the opportunity to freewrite may have had a greater impact on the students' style than the assignment of audiences. By releasing the students from most academic constraints, freewriting may have stimulated "styling," regardless of audience.

To sum up, Experiments 1 and 2 suggest that assigning a black audience can elicit "styling" that may be absent or rare in writing for a white audience. However, the effect is limited. A few students may "style" only for blacks, while others may use certain types of "styling" more often for blacks. In rare cases, a student might "style" more for a white audience if she feels that the whites are more distant and hostile.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the audience effects are apparent, I cannot say whether the "styling" was a result of the students' exposure to African American rhetoric. First of all, the questionnaire about the students' background could not measure the depth of the students' exposure to the African American tradition, especially within the home. Second, the samples in both experiments did not include a white comparison group. Future experiments should incorporate white as well as black students. However, the interpretation of the results will be difficult because of African American contributions to mainstream culture and media

representations of black culture. It is possible that some white students may attempt to imitate African American "styling."

Another complication lies in the coding guide itself. Since some features of African American rhetoric overlap with features of European rhetoric, at what point are students truly drawing upon an African American rhetoric? One need not grow up in the African American tradition to devise metaphors. Because of the overlapping and fuzzy categories, the raters and I often wondered whether certain utterances should count as African American "styling," even though they fit the coding guide.

Future experiments should not only incorporate a clearer coding guide and a white comparison group, but also a stronger treatment and more measurements. A stronger treatment might include a real white and black audience as well as a prewriting questionnaire to encourage audience analysis. Additional measurements might include style ratings by blacks and whites, an evaluation of the students' writing ability, a measure of the students' sociocognitive aptitude, and an in-depth assessment of their exposure to African American rhetoric. Such measurements could shed more light on the causes and effects of "styling" for black audiences.

Implications for Teaching

Despite the limitations, the present experiments have implications for teaching. The results call for cultural awareness on the part of teachers and metalinguistic awareness on the part of students. A teacher of black students should become

aware of the African American tradition so that s/he can make students who "style" aware of what they are doing and show them how to do so more effectively. The teacher should also encourage students to "style" by assigning freewriting and culturally varied audiences. As long as there are students like Gail, Nora, Maria, Clara, Joetta, Rhonda, and Leroy--students who "style" only for black audiences--black students need a chance to write for blacks. Otherwise, some students may never fully tap their writing resources.

This semester in my composition class I am trying to put into practice what I learned from these experiments, and what's happening? Just listen to my students' writing about Affirmative Action:

> "It is **insurance** and **assurance.**"
>
> "Neither does it aim to **exclude**, only to **include.**"
>
> "The case of affirmative action represents a **contemporary remedy** for an **age-old ailment.**"
>
> "Affirmative Action is not **giving handouts**, it is **giving a hand.**"

My students are playing with language, and through play they are learning to recognize and utilize their language resources.

Notes

1. Signification is a clever (usually indirect) way of insulting someone, while a toast is a poetic tribute to a hero (Smitherman 82, 157).

2. Asante defines styling as "the conscious or unconscious manipulation of language or mannerisms to influence favorably the hearers of a message" (39). In this article the term will refer specifically to the use of black rhetorical devices in writing.

3. Three of the students were Afro-Caribbeans. According to Roger Abrahams, the oral traditions of blacks in the Caribbean and the U.S. are closely related (15-21).

4. In this experiment "freewriting" consisted of unedited writing on the assigned topics. Consequently, the students were not required to correct organizational, grammatical, or spelling mistakes.

5. I did not look for one of the rhetorical qualities--spontaneity--since it is nearly impossible to document in written discourse.

6. Actually, 17 students participated in the experiment. However, one of the students had grown up in Africa. Since this study investigated the influence of an African-American tradition, I excluded the African student's writing samples.

7. Because of late homework and scheduling difficulties, I could not begin the interview-questionnaire phase of the study until two weeks after the poverty assignment was due.

8. Two students gave more than one response.

9. Upon rereading Keisha's work, the coders agreed that "easy detour" was an example of image-making. However, since they overlooked it at first, it has not been included in the tally of stylistic features.

10. See Matalene for a discussion of the important role of commonplaces in non-Western rhetoric.

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Table 1
Students' Reported Audiences

Student	Affirmative Action		African-American Poverty	
	Black	White	Black	White
1	blacks	whites	middle class & poor	middle class & poor
2	blacks	whites	bourgeois & professional	individualists
3	conservatives	whites	successful	white society
4	blacks	females & liberals	upper middle class on down	white society
5	blacks	whites	educated	educated
6	blacks	whites	conservatives	racists
7	blacks	whites	blacks	whites
8	blacks	conservatives	conservatives	average
9	blacks	working class	blacks	most whites
10	----------		NAACP	conservatives
11	blacks	whites	underprivileged	ruling class
12	conservatives	most whites	blacks	whites
13	blacks	whites	depressed	whites
14	liberals	liberals & women	lazy (welfare recipients to college grads)	lazy (welfare recipients to college grads)
15	blacks	whites	working class	working class
16	conservatives	conservative males	middle class	conservative males

005-02 Fall 1991

Audience Adaptation Homework

The purpose of this set of exercises is to adjust your style as well as the content and arrangement of your argument so that it appeals to your target audience. You will write two drafts; each should be approximately two singlespaced (handwritten) pages. In both drafts, you should discuss why African Americans are disproportionately poor. Is the main cause racism? Is the government responsible? Or do lack of initiative and lack of unity play a role? Does the problem lie in the quality of our leadership? Or in our value system?

After exploring the possible causes, consider the arguments of your opponents, both Black and White. Then, in one draft try to persuade your White opponents(due ____). In the other draft try to persuade your Black opponents(due _____).

These are freewriting exercises, so you are not required to correct errors in grammar, spelling, or essay form. Feel free to do whatever you think will appeal to your target audience. If you believe that something is appropriate for both audiences, you may use it in both drafts.

Your essay will be evaluated in terms of how well you adapt the style, content, and arrangement to your target audience. To assist me in the evaluation, on the outside of your paper briefly describe your target readers as you imagined them.

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QUESTIONNAIRE
(extra credit/due 12/6)

The following questions refer to your audience adaptation assignment about poverty in the African American community. Please answer them in as much detail as possible. Feel free to write on the back of this sheet if you run out of space.

1. Describe the two audiences that you imagined for this assignment.

2. When you switched audiences for the assignment, did you try to change your writing style?

3. Answer (a) or (b).

(a) If so, HOW did you change your style to fit each audience? Quote examples from your drafts.

(b) If not, why didn't you change your style? Describe the style you adopted, quoting examples from your drafts.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE Fall 1991

YOUR OPINION

6. What kind of speaking and writing styles are Black audiences most receptive to?

7. What kind of speaking and writing styles are White audiences most receptive to?

YOUR BACKGROUND

1. Did you grow up in a predominantly white neighborhood?

2. Did you attend predominantly white primary and secondary schools?

3. Did you grow up in a Black church where you heard preaching that sounded like the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, and other traditional Black Baptist ministers?

4. Do you ever speak Black English (e.g., "She be workin'" or "Wasn't nobody in the house" "He sick today")?

5. Do you know the slang of Black street speech well enough to fit in with streetwise Blacks?

T. Redd INSTRUCTIONS FOR CODERS January 1992

Purpose: to identify features of African American style in students' freewriting

1. Read the excerpt by Geneva Smitherman to learn how she classifies stylistic features of the African American oral tradition.

2. Study the coding guide. These are the eight features that you will look for in the students' drafts.

3. Read Drafts T, U, V, X, Y, and Z from the pilot study. These drafts are "focused freewriting exercises" that prepared students for writing an essay. Therefore the students were not required to conform to rules of grammar, spelling, or essay form. Please disregard all of my comments, checks, underlining, and other marks: They are NOT related to the purpose of this study.

   As you read the drafts, highlight any words, phrases, or sentences that fall within Smitherman's categories. Write the name of the feature in the left margin. If you are not sure about something, highlight it and place a "?" in the left margin.

   Note: Don't worry if you can't find any of the selected features in a draft.

4. On Tuesday, February 11, from 12:30 to 3:00, we will meet in my office (Locke 270). Please bring all of the enclosed materials. After we compare notes about the pilot study drafts, you will begin coding the drafts for the follow-up study. Once a consensus has been reached, you may continue coding at home.

5. I would like to receive all of the coded drafts by Tuesday, February 18. If there are any inconsistencies in the coding, I will call a brief meeting to resolve the disagreements.

T H A N K S F O R Y O U R H E L P !

Call me if you need help.
301-593-6487
202-806-6114 (MWF)

(a) exaggerated language (high-flown words or incongruously formal phrasing)

EXAMPLE: "When Jesus walked the face of the earth, you know it upset the high ES-U-LAUNCE." *[The speaker emphasizes the word "echelons."]*

(b) mimicry (imitation of a person's voice, language, and mannerisms)

EXAMPLE: "Like he come tellin' me this old mess bout "'Well, baby, if you just give me a chance, Ima have it together pretty soon.'"

(c) aphorisms (proverbs and other popular sayings)

EXAMPLE: "A hard head make a soft behind."

(d) word play (puns and other clever turns of phrase)

EXAMPLE: "I don't know Karate but I know Karazor." *[The speaker threatens to use a razor as a weapon.]*

(e) image-making (metaphors and other imagery, especially down-to-earth imagery)

EXAMPLE: Wig-wearing females "look like nine miles of bad road with a detour at the end."

(f) braggadocio (boasts about oneself or heroes)

EXAMPLE: Stag-O-Lee was so bad "flies wouldn't fly around him in the summertime."

(g) indirection (innuendo, circumlocution, or suggestiveness)

EXAMPLE: "Mr. Moderator, Brother Lomax, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies: I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend and I don't want to leave anybody out."

(h) tonal semantics (talk-singing, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, intonational contouring, and other lyrical effects)

EXAMPLE: "I am nobody talking to Somebody Who can help anybody."